Smoky Mountain Amateur Radio Club W4OLB

President: Bob Wilson, KK4XA 865-755-3810

www.smokymountainarc.org info@w4olb.org

RE: Response comments to FCC Proposed Rule Making, MD Document 20-270

The W4OLB Smoky Mountain Amateur Radio Club has in 70+ licensed amateur radio operators from teenagers to our oldest member and club trustee in his 80s. Our members support each other and the local community. The club leadership continually places the highest priority on bringing in everyone interested in learning about the Amateur Radio Service and continues to add young and energetic newcomers who keep the group vibrant. To bring these newcomers into the world of wireless our members go out of their way to help, offer training, conducting official tests and once licensed, we continue to offer assistance.

Amateur Radio Service clubs are the lifeblood of this community service-based offering and a place where individual licensed operators combine their resources (talent, operational experience and finances) by creating needed shared technology systems. Without Amateur Radio Service clubs, the growth would slow and the assistance to up-and-coming youth into this exciting world of wireless could very well become another block to the excitement of STEM. Our youngest is a 9-year-old girl studying for her license. A member has pledged to get her a radio when she passes the exam.

Many of our licensed radio operators entered their ultimate occupation due to an early introduction to Amateur Radio and into the field of electronics. Much of what they learned as youth became the foundation of their careers in technology and providing service to their communities. This is what our club expects to do for all newbies to this exciting world by supporting especially youth into STEM.

Most successful Amateur Radio Service clubs offer classes, conduct official testing and even go so far as to having the ability to enter official information into the FCC database and the newly licensed operator can go online to print a real FCC license. We have also taken on the task of self-regulation to the greatest degree possible, only asking for assistance when other options did not work.

The Smoky Mountain Amateur Radio Club also supports the local county Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) by providing the club member funded radio repeater and transferring ownership of the club's radio trailer to Blount County ARES. New amateur radio operators who were trained and licensed initially by the club also provide their services as members of the local ARES group.

ARES is established primarily to ready licensed operators to train and become ready to be called to serve by official government action if ever the need arises. If called to action where and when necessary then the ARES group would be redefined as Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES), authorized in Part 97.407 of the FCC rules and regulations. Since 1941, if called by a government authority, RACES members become an extension of public safety communications. Most states offer these licensed communications operators special vehicle tags identifying them as volunteer emergency service personnel, the same as firemen, EMS and other medical personnel.

As is the situation in many states, the local ARES group support an extensive wireless Amateur Radio Service network between all hospitals and the state Emergency Management Office to relay messages. Another served group is the American Red Cross, with an exercise November 14th actually extending beyond the borders of the US. Other than the Internet, no other such capability exists with no-cost trained and seasoned operators.

With our 70 plus Amateur Radio Operators, our club also supports local Boy Scout troops through training and offering these youth the opportunity to learn about the basics of wireless and how they might enter this field of technology. Operators take part in scout conventions and scouts are invited to our events to experience firsthand and get practice. There are readily understood impediments to becoming licensed with cost being a big one.

The proposed $50 license fee basically doubles the entry cost as a simple two-way radio can be acquired for $35 and a study guide, about $15. The rest is up to the drive of each individual to obtain a license.

We believe the FCC needs to consider how proposed licensing fees may well have a negative impact on some ARES/RACES operators and especially on youth who expect to enter the wireless STEM world via ham radio. Most adult licensed Amateur Radio Operators will be able to pay the $50 but to these new young volunteers are not yet wage earners and this fee would not come easy.

Maybe there is some middle ground to be considered such as a graduated fee or maybe only a fee for renewals only if it is found a fee must be charged. As a club, we have elected to not charge new members for their first year of membership for the same reasons. ARES/RACES groups, in most cases do not have membership dues as these licensed Amateur Radio Operators are investing their funds in equipment and routine training exercises just as other public safety volunteers, taking many of the same courses. Maybe there should be recognition of ARES members with reduced or no license fees for the services they prepare themselves to deliver.

In summary, the FCC has authorized the Amateur Radio Service and has provided for the frequency allocations to support this emergency communications service. The Amateur Radio Service is not a money-making enterprise, operators provide emergency communications when called upon and Amateur Radio is a route to energize STEM activities with youth. We trust the right decisions will be made to not create undue artificial roadblocks to the Amateur Radio Service and its willing providers.